

One AME's Brush With a Hose

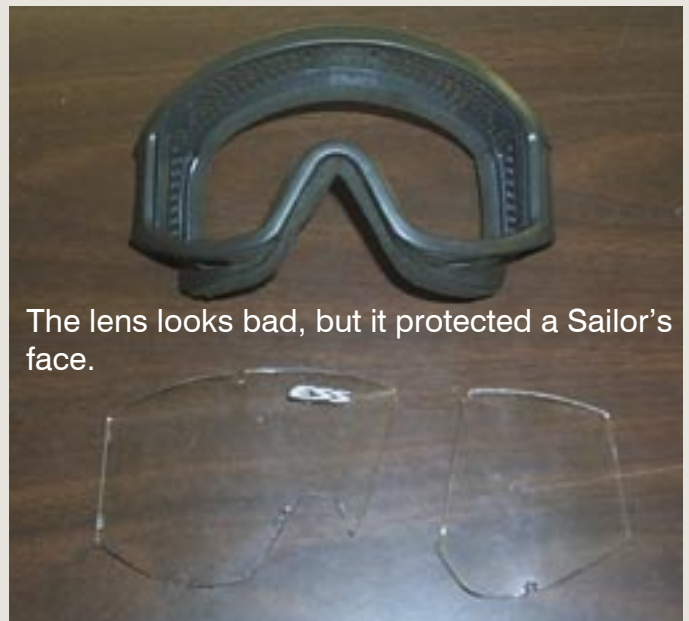
By AMEAN Alejandro Amezcua

It was a cold, hazy morning on the line at NAF El Centro, Calif. AMEAN Augustin Garcia was troubleshooting aircraft 574 on the Viking transient line, while on detachment from Whidbey Island, Wash. He was tired because it was 7 a.m., and he had gotten only three hours' sleep. That feeling should have served as a warning, but it didn't.

Airman Garcia went about his usual troubleshooter tasks, and things were going smoothly. He seemed OK, although the drone and roar of the Prowler's twin Pratt & Whitney J52-P408 engines reverberated through his Mickey-Mouse ears. Another shipmate, AME3 Greg Segura, was working on the starboard side. AMEAN Garcia went through the motions that we all have gone through hundreds of times.

The day was starting off well, until we started to pull the strut pins for the main landing gear. Petty Officer Segura handed the starboard-side pin to Airman Garcia, who was pulling the nose pin. Suddenly, we heard a thunderous "Boom!" A concussive blast followed that horrible sound, and it momentarily left the airman paralyzed. Standing there frozen, he caught a glimpse of something moving rapidly toward him. It was moving too fast for him to react. The object struck him twice in the face, a few times in the chest, and once in the left knee.


After hitting the deck hard, he was stunned, and everything went dark for a moment. He came around but felt dizzy; however, he was able to see shipmates staring at him. They thought he had been injured seriously or killed. The huffer hose from an NCPP-105 had separated from the locking collar, causing a wild-hose situation. When the hose hit him in the face, his goggles took the full brunt of the collision, splitting straight down the middle.



The lens looks bad, but it protected a Sailor's face.

"I was lucky to have been wearing them...because if I hadn't, my face probably would look like a smashed soda can just waiting to be recycled," said Airman Garcia after the incident. "I am here and able to talk with you because I wore the proper PPE in a highly hazardous environment and at the right time. The goggles saved my good looks and possibly even my life."

This experience left AMEAN Garcia with a black eye and a three-day headache, but things could have been a lot worse. It's not every day that a huffer causes such a problem, and it could have been avoided. We should have taken proper steps to make sure the hose was in serviceable condition.

Everyone in the squadron learned that we always should wear our protective equipment and do so the right way. We also must make sure that support equipment is in good condition and that we operate it safely. This day is one that Airman Garcia and I will remember forever. 

AMEAN Amezcua wrote this story while assigned to VAQ-129 on a detachment to NAF El Centro.